1:Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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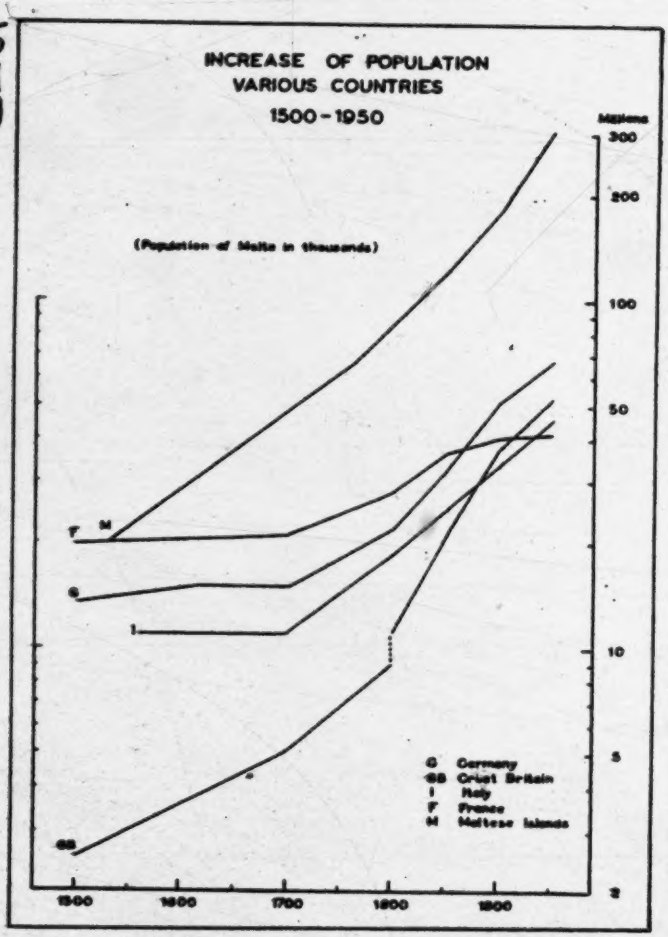

Fig. 35 Increase of Population, Various Countries, 1500-1950.

[p. 134-B]

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
EZ6 Malta EZ6

exception of 1943, there has been no recorded instance of a birth rate as low as 26.5, which was the figure for 1958. 163

In the late nineteenth century, Maltese birth rates were comparable with those of southern Europe, but subsequent decline has been much delayed in Malta. Economic progress in the Islands during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was accompanied by a rising rather than by a falling birth rate. The pattern of natality in Malta since 1911, however, conforms to trends experienced elsewhere in Europe, although the rates themselves have not been the same. The decline in the Maltese birth rate during the 1914-18 War was less marked than on the European mainland and there was an actual increase in Malta between 1919 and 1939, when other European rates declined. The post-war upsurge in births reached its peak early in Malta and while the birth rates of most European countries have been stable at a medium level over the last few years, that of Malta has been falling from the most recent peak. 163 171

DEATHS

The decline in mortality during the past few years has been even greater than that in births. Before the Second World War, the Maltese death rate had fallen below 20 on but three occasions and in 11 separate years it had exceeded 30. Since 1953 it has stayed consistently below 10, thus becoming directly comparable with the death rates of the most advanced Western European countries. 165 [171]

In the nineteenth century, the Maltese death rate was subject to violent annual fluctuations. The worst years were those of epidemic cholera, but even in the latter part of the century, when this was less common, the rate remained high. The main factors responsible were poverty, disease and unsanitary living conditions which were particularly reflected in high infant mortality. Improvements in drainage, sewerage and water supply were effective in reducing mortality from nearly 27/1,000 in the 1890's to 21 in the 1930's but much greater reductions were achieved once the problem of infant mortality was attacked. As recently as the 1920's, this was still as high as 250 per 1,000 live births and only in 1936 did it fall below 200. The decline in this rate was further delayed by the Second World War but by 1944 it had fallen to 114. Since then, progress has been rapid, and infant mortality in 1958 stood at 40 per 1,000 live births, a level comparable with those of many European countries.

Thus, in Malta, as in other European countries, the death rate has been reduced largely as a result of declining infant mortality and the reduction although late has been extremely rapid. A further decline is both possible and, on humanitarian grounds, desirable.

NATURAL INCREASE

Statistics of births, deaths, marriages and natural increase are illustrated in Figs. 54 and 55. In the years since 1948, the natural increase has reached its highest level because of a remarkable decline in the death rate. The absolute natural increase in the decade 1831-40 was 5,241 whereas in 1941-50, despite the low birth rate of the war years, the excess of births over deaths was 52,833. The current natural increase runs at about 5,000 a year, ten times that of a century ago. 161

The annual rate of natural increase in 1831-40 was less than 5 per 1,000; by the end of the century it had reached 10 and in 1941-50 it was 18, since when it has maintained the present rate of 19. The general upward trend has not been an even one as the graph shows, there being peaks in 1851-60, 1881-90, 1901-10 and 1941-50, of which the first and last were the highest. The former was a period of high birth rates, a moderate death rate and very early marriage; the latter was one of rapidly falling death rates and a post-war upsurge in births. The troughs in the curve were lowest in the early and mid-nineteenth centuries, corresponding to times of frequent sickness and epidemic, of which the late 1860's and early 1870's provide examples.

Annual fluctuations in natural increase reflect specific historical events. On six occasions, the number of deaths in a year has exceeded the number of births. In 1837, '47, '50 and '65, epidemic cholera was the cause. In 1874, a

[Text Continues on P. 155]

1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
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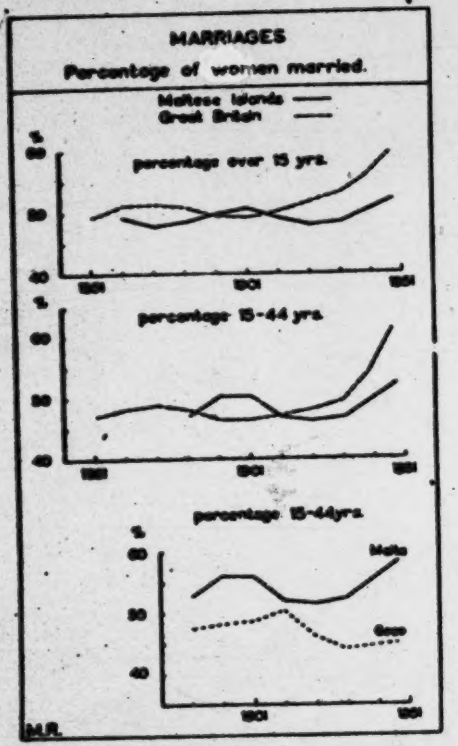

Fig. 56 Marriages: Percentage of Women Married.

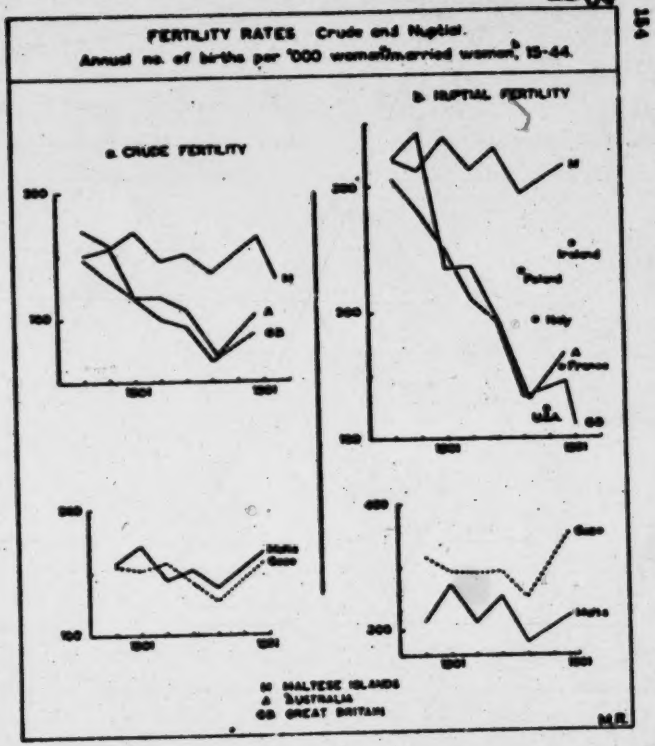

Fig. 57 Fertility Rates: Crude and Nuptial.

B. Cultivation Equipment and Tillage

Of the implements observed in Malta, the traditional types of plough, hoe, sickle and harrow are of the same genera as those to be generally found in the Mediterranean region (Fig. 140).

Ploughs are of the *Aratrum* or *Ard* type, steel tipped wooden wedges, devoid of cutting edges and having very restricted powers of furrow making or inversion - *moldrist*. None of those observed had lateral 'ears' or 'wings' but apparently ards thus equipped are occasionally used. There are various sub-types with differing arrangements of beam, body and handle but no constant rational relationship between these sub-types and local environments could be observed. Prices range upwards of £4 10s. 0d. Iron or steel tips for the body cost about £1. One interesting modification of the plough is manufactured at Żurrieq. On top of the basic beam and body is fitted a movable double mouldboard of which either or both breasts can be brought into operation at any one time. Ridging and left and right furrow inversion are therefore made possible. For those areas where furrow inversion is practicable such a cheap, light multi-purpose implement would be very valuable, and the development of such improvements might well be encouraged by official approbation.

Hoes are manufactured in four main types. The heavy spade type, the *Sappuna*, is generally used for soil trenching in preparation for manuring. The effort involved tends to restrict its use. The small, single tined, wedge-shaped hoe, the *Mghazqa* or *Lexxuna*, is a general purpose implement that is replaced under damp and cohesive soil conditions by a forked, two-tined variety, the *Kroxun*. A three-tined hoe is often used, together with the ard, for potato lifting. In general, each cultivator possesses a selection of different types of hoe, necessitated by the variety of manual operations he usually has to perform and made possible by the reasonable prices of the implements (prices range from about 16s. for the single-tine, to 16s. to £1 for the spade hoe).

The sickle in general use is a small, smooth-edged type costing about 12s. 6d. The small number of sickle types observed may result from the widespread practice of pulling rather than cutting green fodder. Traditional harrows are almost invariably of the Mediterranean and Asiatic type, harrows cum levellers and seed coverers. Those observed were triangular and stone weighted. When manufactured for the purpose they were usually constructed of ash and had removable tines. Without metal tines, the cost is about 30s.

These implements, of which illustrated examples are given (Fig.140), have already to some extent been displaced by imported newer types. Most farmers who possess fields which are at all accessible to tractors now periodically hire contractors to plough the land with mouldboard or disc ploughs and even, in some areas, with deep digger-ploughs. Where plots are small or the terrain difficult, then rotary cultivators are hired or purchased. These latter machines, in spite of their relatively high cost - usually over £200 in Malta - are amazingly popular and are more and more replacing the *ard* and the hoe. The reasons for, and implications of this popularity are examined below.

The spade proper is hardly ever used, and its absence is associated with the reasons for the survival of the *ard* plough. Small, light, flexible, metal harrows are to be found. Entirely imported, their only advantages are their flexibility on rough ground and ease of draught. They are, on the other hand, more easily damaged and more difficult to repair than their wooden prototypes. Other equipment includes a great range of fixed and movable adjuncts to farming, all but one class of which are constructed rurally from local materials. The exceptional group is that connected with irrigation and includes windpumps and small diesel engines. Threshing and winnowing, traditional style, needs no more than a rock or *lorbe* (beaten earth) floor and asses or horses for trampling. baskets constructed of local cane, and simple wooden winnowing forks. Of recent years, centralised threshing by contractors' machines has almost entirely displaced the older method in all but the more remote western regions. Canes, grown in slightly marshy conditions in wied floors, provide the raw material for wind breaks, covered forcing beds, crop supports, etc.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

persons with political or economic influence. Once a kin relationship is made known, it establishes a special tie between the two parties, and preferential treatment often follows; for kin are expected to help each other.

The ties of kinship can also be extended artificially by asking non-kin to become godparents or marriage witnesses. Although parents normally choose persons to fill these offices from among their parents, uncles and aunts, thus reinforcing already existing kin ties, they quite often ask influential non-kin to perform this function. While the obligations created by godparenthood in Malta, as in Italy, are not as demanding as they are in Spain, and Spanish America,[1] the godparent (*parrinu*) is expected to favour his godchild (*filjozz*), if not the child's father.[2] Thus the institution of godparenthood plays a part in the system of patronage. Influential persons, however, are more often asked to become marriage witnesses. This relationship is not enduring. When influential non-kin are asked to fill this office it is done as much to increase the prestige of the families of the couple getting married as it is to honour a patron.

There is constant informal contact between relatives living in the same village. These informal meetings strengthen kin ties and ensure that people have a wide knowledge of their kin. Thus a friend in Farrug was able to name 49 households in the village (20 per cent of the total) whose members were descended from his father's six siblings. Although the spread of this old man's family was unusual, no one in the village did not have some relatives living there. The many cross-cutting bonds of kinship thus reinforce the multiplex ties created by neighbourhood, common culture and shared devotion to common symbols, and bind together the inhabitants of a village into the tightly united community which outsiders see.

[1] See Gallatin Anderson, *A Survey of Italian God-parenthood* (The Kroeber Anthropological Society Papers, No. 15; Berkeley, 1956), J. A. Pitt-Rivers, *The People of the Sierra* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954), pp. 107 f.; and Sidney W. Mintz and Eric R. Wolf, 'An Analysis of Ritual Co-parenthood (Compadrazgo)', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology*, VI (1950), 341–68.

[2] The reciprocal term *xbin* is used between a godparent and the father of his godchild. Friends and even strangers often use it to address one another; it is a way of reducing social distance and making possible a more intimate association. Michael Kenny in his book, *A Spanish Tapestry* (London, Cohen and West, 1961), p. 72, notes that this is also an Andalusian custom.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

CHAPTER VIII

The Village and the Outside World

557 602 Every Maltese is at the centre of a large network of kin relations. Thus, when the need arises, many people are able to move along the intricate channels of consanguinity and affinity to establish personal contact with influential persons. It has also been noted that this network of kin can be extended artificially. Important persons, such as politicians, police officers, high civil servants and professionals are often invited to become godparents, marriage witnesses and confirmation sponsors. These relationships are constantly manipulated to bring individuals in touch with decision makers. This gives a personal content to many official decisions. Since most people honour the obligations of kinship, friendship and neighbourhood, requests which appeal to these values stand a good chance of a favourable reply. But a large network of kinsmen can also be a liability to a civil servant, for the favourable 557 602 treatment he is expected to give a kinsman often conflicts with 647 the civil service ethic of impartiality. This can place persons in authority in awkward positions, since the refusal of a request may seriously affect either their personal relations or their professional integrity. Maltese civil servants thus work under pressure which is quite unfamiliar to their counterparts in larger, less intimately related societies.

II

● 171 557 771 776 Another method of handling contacts with authority is through influential patrons. By 'patron' I mean a person who uses his influence to assist and protect some other person, who then becomes his 'client'. In a Catholic society there is a strong ideological basis for a system of patronage, for there is great similarity between the function of saints and mortal patrons. Michael Kenny points to this correspondence in his study of patronage in Spain[1] and, in general terms, his analysis is equally applicable to

[1] 'Patterns of Patronage in Spain', *Anthropological Quarterly*, XXXIII (January 1960), pp. 14–23.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Malta. He sees the patronage system in Spain as a pyramidal structure incorporating both the natural and the spiritual worlds. At the top is God, the supreme patron who is not dependent upon anyone. At the base are the persons who have no clients. Between these lowly clients and God there are many different ranks of patrons, each of whom has his own small pyramid of clients. They, in turn, are clients dependent upon other higher and more influential persons. The patrons of each rank form a group which asks favours from one another on behalf of their clients.

The intermediaries between man and God are the saints, who are closer to God than man is. A person who seeks to influence the decision of a higher authority similarly looks for a person who, by virtue of his kin relation or social position, is closer to the decision maker than he. In view of the functional similarity of saints to living patrons, it should not come as a surprise that the word for patron in Maltese is 'saint' (*qaddis*; plural *qaddisin*). Several proverbs underline the important role that patrons play in Maltese social life. Here are two: 'Without saints you can't get to heaven' (*Minghajr qaddisin ma titlax il-ġenna*); and 'You can do nothing without saints' (*Minghajr qaddisin ma tagħmel xejn*). Another points to the fact that any patron-client relationship is not without obligation, even danger, for the client: 'He who fattens you will kill you' (*Min semmnek joqtlok*).

Who are these 'saints', these men of influence? For the most part they are people who have already been encountered, albeit in a slightly different capacity. They are the professionals, the civil servants and, in general, the wealthy and powerful. They are persons, respected for their education and social standing in the world outside the village, who can deal as equals with other important people and decision-makers, many of whom are their relatives and former classmates. Their patronage is sought by individuals and groups alike. They are often asked to become god-parents, and they are called on to handle the ceremonial, business and political relations of clubs. They are also called on to help secure employment, building permits, hawkers licences or a long-delayed hearing at the law courts. Generally speaking, villagers choose patrons from the circle of influential people with whom they have the closest contact: the local professionals, the parish priest and clergy, the important landlords, all of whom command respect outside the village. Some clients are related to their

4: Cassar P-4, 5 (no date) 1964 EZ6 Malta EZ6

175 755 787 781 (iii) Giovanna Debrincat had been suffering from depression with religious scruples for eight months. Her symptoms became acute one day in February with extreme anxiety, agitation, and insomnia. This phase lasted for four consecutive days and nights in spite of the efforts of the doctor and a priest to reassure her and placate her. Finally her relatives annointed her with the sanctuary oil and appealed to the Blessed Virgin to cure her. The patient immediately became tranquil and had a peaceful sleep. When she woke up, all her symptoms had disappeared (*Id-derot ta Maria*, 1890).

NEOLITHIC VOTIVE OFFERINGS

532 172 782 ●[171] The custom of offering 'ex-votos' to the deity for favours received is not limited to the Maltese Islands and goes back to very remote times. The neolithic 'ex-votos' of Malta are made of clay and limestone, and measure from 1¼ to 3½ inches in height. No less than fifteen of them, consisting of the following anatomical forms, have been found:

(i) Faces: 2.
(ii) Hand: 1.
(iii) Female torsos with large abdomen, pendulous breasts, and prominent genitalia: 4.
(iv) Kneeling female (?) torso with arms folded on breast: 2.
(v) Fragment of female statuette consisting of lower abdomen, both thighs, and right leg: 1.
(vi) Female body cut short in the neck and upper parts of the thighs; the left arm is bent on the nape of the neck and the right upper limb points to the genitalia which are very clearly shown. The abdomen and breasts are very full and a swelling fills the left groin while pieces of white shells are stuck in the armpits, groins, umbilicus, mons veneris, and other parts.
(vii) Female pelvis with upper parts of thighs and sexual triangle: 2.
(viii) Legs: 2 (Zammit & Singer 1924, p. 67).

17 782 [797] The Roman occupation of Malta (218 B.C.–A.D. 397) is represented by one solitary 'ex-voto' consisting of a clay model of the lateral view of a leg and foot. It was found quite recently with other Roman objects in the north-west part of the island (Plate 1, Fig. 2). The inhabitants of the Maltese Islands were converted to Christianity by St Paul in A.D. 60. No more 'ex-votos' can be traced for many hundreds of years until they reappear in the eighteenth century under the influence of the Catholic Church. The interruption in the time-sequence and the change of religious beliefs do not, however, prevent us from perceiving that they have a common purpose and that the 'ex-votos' of Stone Age and Roman times foreshadow the similar ones of later years. Indeed the same ideational process links the ancient ones with those of our own times.

782 532 755 Anatomical 'ex-votos' are still preserved in many of the Catholic churches of Malta and Gozo and in several wayside shrines in the countryside and in niches in the towns. They are either figures of the complete human body or of parts of it. The former consist of the front view of babies with the trunk and limbs swathed in bands like a mummy; and of side views of men and women in a kneeling posture with their hands joined in prayer over their breasts or else holding a symbolical heart. The men are turned towards the left and the women look towards the right. The models representing parts of the

4: Cassar P-4, 5 (no date) 1964 EZ6 Malta EZ6

782 silver medal, seventeen "ex-votos" of silver, and £39 10s. 6d. in cash' (*Id-devot ta Maria*, 1894). In November 1961 twenty-two gold rings and thirty-one pairs of gold ear-rings, besides sums of money, were offered as 'ex-votos' at the shrine of St Rita at St Augustine's Priory, Valletta (*Santa Rita*, 1961, p. 192).

DISCUSSION

154 782 771 753 761 The relief of anxiety is one of the basic needs of the human personality. In a religion-conditioned community, such as that of the Maltese Islands, one of the most potent defence mechanisms against life-threatening situations consists in prayer and the offer of 'ex-votos' to the Godhead in order to receive deliverance in return. Perhaps what underlies this aspect of human behaviour is the idea that sickness and death are punitive measures from the Godhead for lapses committed by oneself, one's relatives, or one's community. As a matter of fact, the notion that illness is sent by God as a punishment for sins is still a current folk-belief in the Maltese Islands. The same trend of thought finds expression in certain depressive psychoses where the patient shows a heightened feeling of guilt and is convinced that divine wrath has been visited upon himself and his close relatives in the form of disease or death. It appears, therefore, that the 'ex-voto' is not a mere token of gratitude for a favour received but is also a propitiatory offering to appease the offended deity and thus obtain his pardon and the removal of the punishment. The element of sacrifice is implied in the self-denying act of surrendering a precious thing in return for recovery of health or rescue from imminent death, either materially in the shape of money or jewellery, or symbolically in the form of an anatomical representation of one's body. Whatever the psychological motivation prompting the offer of 'ex-votos', there is no doubt that they throw an illuminating sidelight on the part played by religious belief in the history of healing in the Maltese Islands since prehistoric times. They are also a testimony to the beneficial influence of religious *mores* (1) in satisfying the natural craving for security felt by the individual and by the community when faced with the crises of life, and (2) in maintaining morale and the will to live when the failure of medical skill tends to disorganize and destroy them. Indeed the 'ex-votos' reveal the story of the triumph of hope and faith over the trials and sufferings of countless generations of Maltese men and women who had found themselves beyond the help of contemporary science and of human assistance. It is needless to emphasize the recasting of Maltese religious beliefs after their conversion to Christianity in A.D. 60.

154 782 171 [178] The change from paganism to Catholicism, coupled with technical and cultural developments, has brought about a parallel modification in the conventional form of the 'votiva'—from the baked clay image, the painted panel, and the wax and silver anatomical models to the exquisite examples of the jeweller's art; but the idea behind the changed outward sign remains immutable, i.e. the anxiety-relieving value of faith in a community where belief in an all-controlling God has, for thousands of years, been the pervasive character of the warp and woof of its cultural and psychological pattern.

5: Cremona B-3, 4 (no date) 1923
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Maltese Death, Mourning, and Funeral Customs.

764 Sir James Frazer's communication of a coroner's note about "Beliefs regarding Death in Cumberland"[1] has suggested to me that I might put on record Maltese funeral customs now extant, some of which are analogous to those noticed in Cumberland.

764 263 [84] [565] [171] Amongst our middle and lower classes the practice still lingers of placing a dish of salt on the stomach of the corpse, whether of a male or of a female. The popular belief in Malta is that the salt prevents early decomposition. Certeux and Carnoy[2] give the following interpretation of a practice by Arabs in Algeria: "*Il est de convenance religieuse . . . de lui poser sur le ventre* [of the dead person] *quelque chose de pesant, afin de prevenir le gonflement.*" One of our Maltese sayings runs:

[539]

"*Imût il-ghani u jmut il-fqir*
It-tnejn jitmelhu ghal geñña il-bir."

i.e. "Both the rich man and the poor man die, and both are salted for the pit" (a common rock tomb). This may, however, refer to the pickling or preservation of bodies in a saline solution.

764 The covering over of looking-glasses in the room where the body is lying is also practised by several Maltese families. Some go so far as to remove furniture, and turn round or take down pictures, in the death chamber and passages.

764 171 The following are the most characteristic features of existing Maltese practices, many of which are comparable to those of Sicily, while a few show some Eastern influence:—

(*a*) The washing of the dead body before shrouding. This is not a religious rite, and has no connection with that of Islam.

(*b*) The shutting of the eyelids, if open, and the raising of the chin by means of a band, usually a white kerchief, tied on the head.[3]

(*c*) The removal of door knockers and knobs; house doors are kept closed for several days; neighbours half-shut their own.

[1] Vol. xxxi., p. 154. [2] *L'Algerie Traditionelle*, p. 223.

[3] This is practised in Algeria. See Certeux and Carnoy, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

5: Cremona B-3, 4 (no date) 1923
EZ6 Malta EZ6

In some districts doors or knockers are draped with black crape.

(*d*) The lowering of window blinds for some months. Some people, who follow old customs, replace all window curtains by linen sheets.

(*e*) The hiring of poor women and beggars to pray over and watch the corpse for the whole night. This custom prevails mostly in Gozo. In old days official female mourners, named *neffieha* (from *neffilah*, "to cry") were employed. The practice was abolished in Malta during the plague of A.D. 1676.[1] Sicilians employed mourners called Praeficae or Reputatrices, a custom of Greek and Roman origin and practised by the Irish until A.D. 1849. It still prevails among the Corsicans and the Sahara tribes of Algeria. The old ceremonial of the Maltese female mourners is described by Abela as follows:—

They wore trailing veils (*kurkár*), and when they entered the premises of the deceased they cut down the bower vines in the yard and threw the flower pots from the balconies and windows into the street. They searched the house for the finest piece of china, dashed it on the floor, and mixed the fragments with ashes from the hearth. They boiled the whole together in a pot, and with the mixture washed the door posts and window shutters of the house. During these proceedings they sang couplets which ended in long-drawn sighs and lamentations. Then they gathered round the corpse and knelt down, extolling the virtues of the deceased, the relations joining in their mourning.

(*f*) An oil lamp is often lit and left for forty days before the Crucifix or image of the Madonna in the death chamber. This is supposed to please the soul of the departed, whose ghost is in this way prevented from haunting the house. In some of the Gozo villages the persons attending the corpse to the burial-ground return in procession after the funeral mass to the room of the deceased, where they kneel down and say the rosary before the Crucifix, placed on a chest covered with white cloth, and between two lighted candles which are afterwards replaced by the devotional oil lamps. The belief still lingers that the

[1] Abela and Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata*, vol. ii. p. 794.

5: Cremona B-3, 4 (no date) 1923
EZ6 Malta EZ6

The belief still lingers that the lamp must remain lighted for forty days, during which the soul of the departed remains above the flame.

(g) Some families give the poor bread. The love-feasts of the primitive Christians were in mediaeval times replaced in both Malta and Sicily by the distribution of cakes and of boiled wheat mixed with sesame. Distributions of meat and bread to the poor came also to be a custom at some *festas*, but were continued in Sicily mainly by the giving of beans and bread on All Souls' Day.[1] In Malta on that day, however, the old custom has been replaced by the free kitchens or the "Potage for the Poor" (*Borma tal-Fqâr*).

Mourning customs in Malta have during the last century passed through wide changes and, as in other European countries, have reverted to a more simple type. Some are purely mediaeval, and are influenced by the prolonged intercourse with Sicily and Italy during the rule of the Grand Masters. The vernacular term for mourning is *vistu*, corresponding to the Sicilian *visitusu* ("to be in mourning").

The wearing of special mourning clothes was general in the fourteenth century, but became less marked by the year 1700. Women used to wear woollen trailing skirts and dark shawls over their heads. Some better-class people wore one black transparent veil over the head and another veil of black silk taffeta over the gown, reaching to the waist. A sort of Majorca woollen cloth is prescribed for mourning wear to the heirs under a will of A.D. 1543. The Grand Master's suite wore a special garment called *Scoto*, of thin light serge. Although it is nowadays customary with some families to put on as little mourning as possible and to shorten its period, a full mourning dress is worn by others for two full years after the death of parents. The simplest style of mourning, a black necktie and a crape arm band, is in general use after the death of a distant relative.

Family mourning is generally observed as follows:—

I. Closure of business premises, a mourning notice being affixed to the door.

II. Women keep indoors for a few weeks, only going out in

[1] G. Pitrè, *Spettacoli e Feste Popolari*, vol. xii. p. 407.

5: Cremona B-3, 4 (no date) 1923
EZ6 Malta EZ6

the early morning to hear mass. In old times such seclusion was much more strictly observed, and the period was never less than forty days. For men this sort of mourning did not exceed seven days, and is now generally limited to three days, after the funeral.

III. Old custom prohibited cooking for three days, and the family of the deceased was provided with meals by friends or distant relatives. This rule was, and perhaps is still, followed in some districts of Sicily and amongst Arab tribes of Northern Africa. While meals were being served the bereaved family sat with folded legs on the floor, which was covered with a straw mat. The historian Ciantar relates in 1772 that these mourning dinners still took place in his early days. This custom has now been discontinued, and our village people merely abstain from having their pastry and other food prepared in a public oven for a period of some months after the death of a member of the family.

IV. Men often do not shave for a fortnight or even a month. This practice was more in favour in old times. Middle and lower class people keep away from *festas*, and the higher class from theatres, dancing, and merrymakings.

V. People of rank wear a mourning dress for a few days following a death in their family, but country people are satisfied with wearing a black felt hat and a dark sash round the waist. Women, if wives or brides, follow the continental style of full mourning dress in crape. Some women do not wear a hat or bonnet during the first week of mourning, and go out in *faldettas*, a national head-covering which is more commonly used when attending religious services. Since the seventeenth century the Maltese *faldetta* has undergone some changes in shape and material. The old *faldetta*, as described by Ciantar, was a black veil or cowl covering the head and reaching to the heels, like the Arab and Sicilian women's trailing mantles. Apparently countrywomen wore a blue linen veil, which is still adopted, for economy's sake, in some of the eastern seaside hamlets of the island, but amongst the lower class in general the black hood, which matrons changed into silk with lace edges, was more common. Bombazine (without lace) or silk *faldettas* are now

5: Cremona B-3, 4 (no date) 1923
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Bombazine (without lace) or silk faldettas are now the popular style. The vernacular *fulpina* and *ghonnella* for the *faldetta* point to its probable origin; the word *ghonnella* is derived from the Italian *gonnella*. The term *falda*, with its diminutive *faldetta* (skirt), suggests that this hood or wimple represents the tail of the skirt put over the head inside out in wet weather. Black stone trinkets are worn in place of those of gold. Women in both villages and towns who cannot afford to buy special trinkets cover their earrings with black stuff.

The old funeral rites, described by Abela and Ciantar from extracts from wills of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, are only faint survivals of the gorgeous pseudo-pagan rites which prevailed in all parts of continental Europe up to the period of the Reformation, and in Malta when under Italian influence. Up to 1872 the burial of the dead generally took place in churches or in churchyards (Maltese *cmutier*, from French *cimetière*). This still continues in country places, where people have family vaults. A law providing for extra-mural interment was proposed by De Rohan (A.D. 1775-1797), but it was only enforced by the Police Law of 1869, when a public cemetery was provided in 1871.

Since the adoption of the new burial law, funeral customs have assumed a very simple character. Old custom required that the dead body should be placed on a handbarrow or in a coffin with a cushion stuffed with laurel and orange leaves fixed under the head. The body was then conveyed to the church, with the relatives and friends following, and the wailing of the mourners accompanied by the sound of bagpipes, which in some villages are now replaced by violins and counterbases to which lamentations are sung. Since the opening of the Addolorata Cemetery the dead are generally transported in hearses. The tolling of funeral bells was once so important that in many wills careful provision was made for it, and it even rivalled the usual charitable bequests. This corresponds to Sicilian custom in the fifteenth century. After burial of the corpse, a black carpet or coverlet, or a velvet counterpane, was laid over the grave, and left there for some days. The offering of flowers to the dead is at present in great favour amongst the less educated, but some of the higher class object to it as a pro-

fanation

175 722 511 454 During the war years the farmer had been able to strengthen his financial position to an unprecendented extent. The high prices which he could command left him with a large reserve upon which to draw during the decade after 1945. Today these reserves are dwindling and disappearing. In part they have been put towards capital improvements on the farm - notably the acquisition of cows and machinery (Section 2), and in part they have been spent [369] on routine home and family maintainance. The farmer in post-War Malta and Gozo has been struggling to live up to 'Urban' standards, to many of which he was introduced as a [426] result of the War. He has, in many cases, been living above his means to the extent of being perpetually in debt. He has somehow failed to adapt himself to his new position and still looks back nostaligically, at least from the financial point of view, to his commanding position during the siege.

434 511 171 [369] Today the farmer's standard of living compares unfavourably with that of the Urban working classes but is notably higher than that of other farming communities in nearby Mediterranean countries. In rural Greece, for example, annual earnings frequently do not exceed £25, although the average per capita income for the whole country is over £60[29]. Yet prices for simple clothing and other essential items are often quite exorbitant, especially for the impoverished Greek farmer. A 1954 survey of seventy Libyan farms in the Zawia area of northern Tripolitania found an average 'farm earnings' of £136 per annum[30], but the present rate for casual farm labour in the area is some 5/- per day only (about £75 per annum) and even less in more rural districts[31].

Thus in Libya a field-labourer may expect to earn little more than half the income of a land-holding farmer. [434] In Malta, however, the situation appears reversed, and the labourer without field commitments of his own can demand his 25/- for an eight-hour day and emerge, in many cases, markedly better off than the farmer who hired him and who stands the loss on unsold, unprofitable or damaged crops.

511 434 Within his own country the Maltese farmer has, on average, a standard of life still slightly below the general level, although the disparity is by no means as great as it was in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Above-average exceptions include those farmers who have been able to profit from the present regime of guaranteed milk sales by building up a large herd, or those who can still draw upon war-time savings or other accumulated reserves.

735 434 The C.A.R.E.[27] assessment of poverty made for the purpose of free food distributions to poor and needy

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7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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seen perambulating the streets, throughout the towns and villages, each with a small oval-shaped wooden box in hand. 527 431

Every child you meet, in wishing you "Is-sena it-tajba" (a Happy New Year) implores the yearly mite, and this he does by shaking his cash, which no doubt consists of some few farthings or halfpennies, whose dulcet jingle, however, fills his little soul with joy.

The practice of giving "l' Istrina" (a small money gift) to these children, to domestic servants and to persons in an inferior position on New Year's Day is a recognised custom in this Island.

This making of presents on the first day of the year is no doubt of great antiquity, and innocent as is now the custom of giving money gifts to the children and servants on New Year's 527 431 171

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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Day, it was in ancient times done by the heathen Romans as a form of homage to the two-faced *Janus*, the God of the year, especially honoured in that capacity in the first month (January), and the giving of "strina" in January was vehemently denounced by the early council of Auxerre, as an act of Pagan worship.

In the *Monthly Miscellany* for December 1592 there is an essay on New Year's gifts, which state that the Romans were great observers of the custom, even when their year began in March and consisted of 10 months of 36 days each, and also when January and February were added by Numa (*) to the other ten, the calends, or first of

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(*) NUMA—a celebrated philosopher born at Cures, a village of the Sabines, on the day that Romulus laid the foundation of Rome.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

January, was the time on which they made presents,and even Romulus (1)and Tatius (2) decreed that every year *vervine* (3) should be brought as an offering to them with other gifts, as a token of good fortune for the New Year. 527 431 191.

Tacitus (4) makes mention of an order of Tiberius (5) forbidding the giving or demanding of New Year's gifts unless it was in the calends of January, at

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(1) Romulus—the founder of Rome was the son of Mars, he was ranked by the Romans among the 12 great gods, being the founder of their city and Empire, and the son of the god of war.

(2) Tatius—king of Cures among the Sabines, made war against the Romans after the rape of the Sabines. He was murdered at Lanuvium B.C. 792.

(3) *Vervine*—a plant which has been connected with some of the superstitious rites of the Greeks & Romans.

(4) Tacitus—a celebrated historian born in the reign of Nero and was destroyed by the secret dagger of an assassin on the 13th of April in the 276th year of the Christian era.

(5)Tiberius—a Roman Emperor after the death of Augustus.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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527 43 171 which time the Senators, as well as the knights and other great men, brought gifts to the Emperor, and in his absence to the Capitol (1).

527 777 It is also the custom in some places of Malta for men to go about strewing some lime in the door-ways on New Year's day. Some idea of good luck may perhaps be associated with the lime; there is no tradition, however, as far as is known, whence this custom arose.

527 203 New Year's greetings in the shape of visiting cards, are very profusely exchanged on this occasion, especially among the better classes.

527 43 533 Groups of street musicians go from house to house, either on the last day of the old year or on the morning of

(1) Capitol, the temple of Jupiter at Rome built on the top of a hill.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

CANDLEMAS DAY

This is a religious festival observed not only in Malta but in all other Catholic countries in honour of the Blessed Virgin on the 2nd of February, the 40th day after the Nativity of our Lord.

The word Candlemas is evidently derived from the benediction of the candles, followed by a procession, which takes place in the churches on the morning of this day.

Nearly every family in the Island is presented with one or two of these blessed candles—each having at the lower end, the image of the Blessed Virgin stamped in gold leaf, as a distinction from other ordinary wax candles.

These they receive either from the priests, or from some other person attached to the church, as a sort of a slight recompense, for the contributions

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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541 evolutions before the doors of the wealthy, to whom the little girl, who is called "Il gharusa tal parata" (the bride), is taken after the performance to receive some money as a remuneration for the trouble taken by the men, who employ the money they collect in defraying the expenses of the band, and the buying or hiring of the costumes they wear. (*)

541 175 648 The parata is a commemoration of the famous victory which the Maltese gained over the Musulmans in 1565.

• [171] (*) In Dr. Chandler's "Travels in Greece" page 133, we read the following passage which bears great resemblance to our "Parata":

"Some Arabian and black slaves who had obtained their freedom and were settled at Athens had a feast on the performance of the rite of circumcision. The women danced in a ring with sticks in their hands, and turning in pairs, clashed them over their heads at intervals, singing wildly to the music."

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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796 533 184 the time through the spectators, each adding his quota to the universal clamour. Everything, however, is done in perfect good humour and no one dreams either of giving or taking offence. (*)

EASTER

796 Very early on Easter Sunday, before daylight, there is, in each town and in some of the villages of Malta, a procession with the image representing the Resurrection of our Lord.

The most popular of these processions is undoubtedly that of Valletta.

Large crowds of people assemble, as

•097 (*) The Greeks celebrate the feast of Easter with singing and shouting in honour of the Resurrection —with crakling of a large bonfire on Easter evening and on Easter morning before daybreak.
(Brand's "Popular Antiquities").

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

796 times at different parts of the town; the best run, however, which is mostly enjoyed, both by the spectators and the carriers of the statue, is that which takes place at the lower end of Strada Reale on the hill opposite St. Catherine's Church and Convent.

Here large crowds of men are seen ready to help the bearers in the run with the heavy statue up the hill.

After traversing several other streets, the image is deposited in the same church from which it started.

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EASTER EGGS &c.

The custom of eating and presenting *fijolli* and round cheese cakes *(kassatat)* is as prevalent in Malta, at Easter, as it is in any other town or country of Italy.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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Maltese children look forward with great anxiety to get either from their parents, or from some friend or relative, a *figolla* at Easter. 796 262 431

The *figolla* consists of a bit of flat baked dough, cut in the shape of a woman, a turk, an eagle, a horse, a star, or a basket, with one or more eggs, having the shell stained red, or some other colour, embedded in its centre and fixed in position by cross bands of paste.

This characteristic rite of Paschal or Easter eggs is most widely diffused. 796 262

The universal connection of eggs with Eastertide does not seem to rest on any Christian symbolism. This popular observance is clearly of pagan origin. 171 174

In pagan imagery the egg was assigned to *Astarte*—the Phœnician Venus—as an emblem of the fructifying

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

forces of nature, and may thus have come to be associated with April, the month held sacred to *Aphroditis* (*), in or near which Easter falls.

We are told that the Jews used eggs in the feast of the Passover, and that when the Persians keep the festival of the Solar New Year (in March) they mutually present each other with coloured eggs. There can be little doubt, however, that the use of eggs at this season was originally symbolical of the revivification of nature, that is, the springing forth of life in spring.

A writer, in the "Gentlemen's Magazine" for July 1783, supposes the Easter egg to be an emblem of the Resurrection of our Lord—in the same manner, as the chicken entombed, as

(*) The Grecian name of Venus

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

it were, in the egg, in due time bursts its shell and springs forth to life. 796 262 174 171.

Hutchinson (History of Northumberland) says: Eggs were held by the Egyptians as a sacred emblem of the renovation of mankind after the deluge.

The Jews adopted it to suit the circumstances of their History as a type of their departure from the land of Egypt, and it was used in the feast of Passover as a part of the furniture of the table with the Paschal Lamb.

The Christians have certainly used it on this day, containing as it does the elements of future life, as an emblem of the Resurrection. It seems that these eggs were decorated for a religious trophy after the days of lent, which are days of mortification and abstinence.

We know also that the Jews in ce-

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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796 lebrating their Passover, placed on the
262 table two unleavened cakes called "pass-
171 over cakes" (*) with hard boiled eggs
174 bound in with slips of paste cross ways on them (†)

Hyde, in his "Oriental Sports" says that the Christians buy eggs at Easter and stain them with a red colour, in memory of the blood of Christ shed for us at the time of the Crucifixion.

That the Roman Catholic Church has considered eggs as emblematical of the Resurrection may be gathered from the Ritual.

St. GREGORY'S DAY
General procession

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793 This very popular feast, which takes place on the first Wednesday after

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(*) The *figolla*.
(†) Brand's "Popular Antiquities."

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Nor I nor they themselves do know.
But on this day are people sent,
On purpose for pure merriment,
And though the day is known before
Yet frequently there is great store
Of these forgetful to be found
Who are sent to dance *Moll*
Dixon's round.
And having tried each shop and stall
And disappointed at them all
At last some tells them of the cheat,
Then they return from the pursuit
And straight way home with shame they run
And others laugh at what is done,
But 'tis a thing to be disputed
Which is the greatest fool reputed,
The man that innocently went
Or he that him design'dly sent."

This custom of imposing upon each other on the 1st day of April, and sending one another upon frivolous, ridiculous and absurd errands, whatever be its origin, appears to be universal throughout Europe.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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In France one thus imposed upon, on the 1st of April, is called "un poisson d' Avril," in England such a person is called an "April fool," in Italy "un pesce d' Aprile" and in Scotland a "Gowk." 527 522 171

It is curious that the Hindoos practice precisely similar tricks on the 31st. of March, when they hold what is called the "Huli Festival."

During the "Huli festival" when mirth and festivity reign among the Hindoos of every class, one subject of diversion is to send people on errands and expeditions that are to end in disappointment and raise a laugh at the expense of the person sent.

The "Huli" is always in March and the last day is the general holiday. [114]

Colonel Pearce in his "Asiatic Researches" proves this to have been a cus-

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

114 tom, from immemorial time, among the
171 Hindoos. The least inquiry, however, into
522 the ancient customs of Persia, or the
527 minutest acquaintance with the general astronomical mythology of Asia, would have told Colonel Pearce that the boundless hilarity and jocund sports, prevalent during the "Huli Festival" in India, have their origin in the ancient practice of celebrating with festival rites the period of the vernal equinox, or the day when the New Year of Persia anciently began (*)

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527 ***ASCENSION DAY***
Lapsi

The Maltese celebrate Ascension day by parties and picnics on the water.

(*) Maurice in his "Indian Antiquities."

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

himself, soon after the *Angelus* used to leave his palace, accompanied by the Grand Prior, the Bishop, and two bailiffs, to set fire to some pitch barrels which were placed for the occasion in the square facing the sacred Hospital. 796 372 175

Great crowds used to assemble here in order to assist at this ceremony. The setting ablaze of the five casks, and later on, of the 8 casks, (*), by the Grand Master, was a signal for the others to kindle their fires in the different parts of the town.

Various opinions are entertained by antiquarian writers with regard to the origin of these fires on St. John's eve. 796 372 171 174

From the account given by Jakob Grimm in his "Deutsche Mythologie" p. p. 583, 593, it would appear that

(*) Eight being the languages of the Order.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

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the great blaze reserved for the eve of the feast of the nativity of St. John the Baptist on the 23rd. of June, is observed with similar rites in every country of Europe.

The kindling of the fire, the leaping over or through the flames clearly show that these rites are essentially of heathen origin. They are obviously connected with the worship of the sun, and were doubtless practised long before the Baptist was born. In old heathen times the summer and winter solstices were the two greatest and most widespread festivals in Europe.

These fires—says another writer—are evidently a remnant of the ancient Beal fires of the Druids, at the *Beil* time, which was at the beginning of May. But why do they chiefly occur on the night before the festival of the

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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Saint, instead of the old period of *Beil* time which was the beginning of May? —I do not believe that a satisfactory explanation of these circumstances has yet been given by any of the antiquaries. It was perhaps to transfer the practice or custom of lighting these fires from a Pagan to a Christian object.

The Nativity of St. John the Baptist was a great and solemn festival of the Church, like those of the other great festivals of Martyrs, the eve or vigil of it was, in the early ages, commemorated with appropriated ceremonies. The public devotions were kept up all night in the churches, of which the Saint was the patron, and the solemnities of the next day were ushered in amongst types and figures appropriate to the occasion. Amongst these was probably introduced a large and

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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527 No reason can be assigned for the
174 origin or meaning of keeping St. Mar-
tin's feast as a day of merriment among
[171] the Maltese. The usage is persisted
in without any association or tradition
to account for it, but the merry mak-
ing in the neighbouring island of
Sicily at this time of the year, when
the new wine is made use of for the
first time.

527 Wine drinkers are of opinion that
262 one can judge best of the flavour of
273 wine after eating some nuts first—
this perhaps is the reason why nuts are
made so much use of on this merry
day.

174 Moresin refers the great doings on
527 this occasion to an ancient Athenian
festival observed in honour of Bacchus,
on the 11th, 12th, and 13th days
of the month of *Anthesterion*, corres-
ponding with our November.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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MAY DAY

175 529 824 Historians mention that there was a time in Malta, during the Government of the Knights of St. John, when it was customary on the 1st of May to deck the Grand Master's palace balcony, and the doors of those who were invested with the Grand Cross, with branches [174] of trees. It appears that this sign of a holiday, which was introduced in Malta by the families from the island of Rhodes, was a remnant of the worship of the sun, formerly adored by the Rhodians.

•171 527 824 Bourne cites Polydor Virgil, as telling us that among the Italians the youth of both sexes were accustomed to go into the fields in the Calends of May, and bring thence branches of trees, singing all the way as they came, and to place them on the doors of their

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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houses. This, he observes, is a relic of an ancient custom among the Heathens, who observed the last 4 days of April, and the 1st day of May in honour of the goddess *Flora* who was imagined to be the deity presiding over the fruits and flowers.

171 527 824

THE CUCCANJA

This is an entertainment which was formerly given by the Grand Master to the Maltese on Shrove Tuesday, the last day of the Carnival.

175 527

Long beams were fixed against the guard house opposite the palace, and between each of the beams, rope-ladders were fastened, the whole being covered over with branches of trees in leaf, to which were tied, from top to bottom, live animals, baskets full of eggs, hams, sausages, and all kinds of provisions.

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7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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443 St. Anna, which are celebrated on the 527 24th, 25th, and 26th of July. These [196] fairs, however, which were once very [198] popular, have now sunk into insignificance and most likely will before long entirely disappear.

443 Fairs have long been regularly held 171 in most parts of Europe and Asia, and they appear to have originated in the Church festivals, which were found to afford convenient opportunities for commercial transactions. The concourse of people being then so such greater than on other occasions.

USAGES

195 The ancient Maltese formerly kept 562 their wives in the strictest retirement. They held the opinion that women should never appear but twice in public,

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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branches of such vines as formed ar- 764
bours in the courts, disturbed the furni- 767
ture &c. in all the apartments, overturn-
ed the flower pots in the windows, broke
some of the ornamental furniture, and
carrying the fragments to a retired spot,
threw them in a cauldron of boiling
water, in which they mixed soot and ash-
es. With this liquid they stained all the
doors in the house howling and sobbing
most dismally whilst performing the
operation. (*) The *neuuieha* then pro- [292]
ceeded to the chamber of the deceased,
already in his coffin, and surrounded by
his female relations, wearing veils over

(*) The custom of mourning for the dead in shrieks [171] •
and howlings is of great antiquity, and prevails almost [152]
universally among the followers of Mahomet.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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764 their faces and black silk cloaks. (*)
767 The room being stripped of all its fur-
[292] niture and hung with black cloth.

[302] The *neuuieha*, throwing themselves on their knees at the foot of the coffin, began singing the praises of the dead, and cut off handfuls of their hair which
[262] they spread over the coffin. On the same
[431] day, cakes and boiled wheat were distributed among all the relations, and the hair was cut off the tails of every horse at the stables belonging to the house of the deceased.

764 The funeral procession was always
533 composed of the relations in mourning preceded by some boys playing the fifes or trumpets.

[765] (*) The colours of the dress or habit. worn to signify
[822] grief are different in different countries. In Europe,
[171] the ordinary colour for mourning is black. *Black*, being the privation of light, is supposed to denote the privation of life.

PULLEYN *Origin & Inventions.*

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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Both Weddings and Funerals are in our duys celebrated in Malta in the same manner as in any other civilized part of the world.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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water, and according to the figure or shape it assumes when it solidifies so will be the fortune of the person who tries the experiment. If the lead becomes bright the maiden is to get a handsome young man for her husband, and lead a happy life with him; if it turns out black the husband will be ugly and the maiden may expect to lead a miserable existence. (*) 787 823

THE BATH

On Easter Sunday as soon as the *Gloria* is sung in the Churches, mothers dip their babies into a bath, in which 755 824

(*) A similar practice is kept up in Denmark, where young women melt lead on New Year's Eve, and after pouring it into water observed in the following morning what form it has assumed. If it resembles a pair of scissors, they will inevitably marry tailors; if a hammer their husbands will be smiths, and so on.
T. Dyer *Domestic Folklore.* [171]

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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The howling of the dog is ascribed by some to its keen sense of the odour of approaching dissolution. 825 763

This superstition which, while not confined to our Island, appears to have been almost as well known in ancient times as at the present day. 825 763 171

Dr. Nathaniel Home, in his "Daemonologie" page 60, says: "If dogs howl in the night near a house where somebody is sick, it is a sign of death."

Capitolinus tells us: that the dogs by their howlings presaged the death of Maximinus.

TINGLING of the EAR

It is a well known superstition among the Maltese that when the ear tingles they usually say that somebody is talking of them. A tingling of the right ear 787 826

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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787 826 denotes that a friend is speaking well of one: a tingling of the left, implying the opposite.

• [177] The opinion, from whence this proverbial saying is derived, is of great antiquity, being thus mentioned by Pliny: "Moreover is not this an opinion generally received that when our ears do glow and tingle some there be that in our absence do talk of us?"

MEETING OF WOMEN

846 787 777 If two women who have been confined on the same day meet before forty days, one of them will suffer some misfortune either in her own person or in that of her child.

THE MONTH OF MAY

777 May is considered as the month of accidents, and consequently many be-

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

827 prevails in Malta as in other parts of the world. (*)

DREAMS

787 There is also a popular superstition in Malta to give interpretation to certain dreams.

The Maltese say that to dream of

[777] (a) fish betokens good luck

(b) the sea foreshews a great trouble

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[771] (*) Carolus Sigonius in his Hist. of Italy would deduce this custom from a pestilence that happened in the time of Gregory the Great (about the year 750) that proved mortal to such as sneezed.

In Brand's "Popular Antiquities" we read that the custom of saluting a person who sneezed was accounted very ancient, even in the time of Aristotle, who in his Problems has endeavoured to account for it, but knew nothing of its origin. According to him, the first men prepossessed with the ideas concerning the head as the principal seat of the soul, carried their respect to sternutation, as the most manifest and the most sensible operation of the head. Hence those several forms of compliments used on similar occasions amongst Greeks and Romans: *Long may you live, May you enjoy health.*

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
EZ6 Malta EZ6

178 so fervently Christian. The reason lies, perhaps, in their
795 Catholicism. The Faith has a tolerant and not unfriendly eye for many of the Old Things. It is hard to think of St. Francis being unkind to a leprechaun.

The savants make much argument about Malta's folklore. The wish being often father to their able reasoning, they will prove from it that the Maltese are Phoenician or Arab or Italian with equal conviction. Like the Cornishman who will tell you that the Hobby Horse was invented to frighten away the French, the people themselves know little if anything of the reasons why certain tales are told, certain things done; but, from birth to grave, the Old Things—often recognisable, but always with their peculiar Maltese twist—make intermittent appearances in the lives of Zeppu[1] and Grez.[1]

Some of them even have so far won the good opinion of Mother Church as to be granted a place in her own ceremonies.

ON GETTING BORN

844 The Maltese baby—boy or girl—gets born with very little
824 fuss, and is always welcome. In Gozo, or in what remains of country, some friend of the mother will assist the arrival of the little one, bringing into the house with her the withered bud of a certain rose. The flower is placed in water and slowly opens. At the moment of its fullest opening the child is born.

844 Here is clearly a very ancient magic. The association of the
824 rose with Motherhood, with Life, and indeed with Godhead
191 itself, is as old as time. In the Litany of Loretto, the Virgin Mother is invoked as "Rosa Mystica"—"Mystical Rose." Dante saw the innermost circle of the heavenly spheres as a rose. The Brahmins, the Persians, and the Jews all attached

844 a high mystic symbolism to the rose. The simple peasant,
824 setting her rosebud in water, little knows what forgotten gods

[1] Popular personifications of the peasant and his wife.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
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539 cess and releases all the captives, including his seven elder brothers.

539 ●171 This story bears traces of a number of legends. The princess may well be Summer, wedded to Autumn, the season with the golden teeth of ripe corn. Imprisoned throughout the winter, the failure of the seven brothers to rescue her may represent the brighter periods of the Maltese mid-winter, followed by the wild weather of early spring. The recurrence of the number seven, in the seven sons and the seven doors is interesting. Seven has always borne a sacred character. It is associated with Indra from whom the seven great rivers of Hindu mythology are supposed to flow. Ishtar or Astarte was clothed in seven garments and passed through seven gates when she descended into the Underworld. Certain details of ths Assyrian and Phoenician story of Ishtar's visit to the underworld suggest that the captive Princess is herself no other than that once powerful goddess whose temples are known to have existed in Malta. Ishtar, descending into the Land of Darkness is admitted on condition that at each of the seven gates she shall shed one of the seven mystic garments from which she draws her divine power. In the Maltese tale, the Evil One causes the princess to remove her shoes—for no reason that is now apparent. At last Ishtar stands before the Queen of the Underworld naked and helpless. She is stricken with all manner of diseases from which she recovers at last when a rescuer, created by her father, the God of Light, releases her and bathes her in the Waters of Life. In the Maltese version it is in connection with the serpent that the Waters of Life appear.

In detailing the attributes of Pietru's seven brothers, the story omits to give any special power to the seventh brother. It may be that there were originally only six brothers, making the monstrous child-hero one of those seven sons, world-renowned for their magic powers.

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Pietru Lagrimanti's strange birth has a parallel in Egyptian mythology, where a man is born of the tears of the deity Nu who personified the Celestial Ocean from which the life-force even of the gods themselves was drawn.

Armed with his great hammer, "Il Lagrimanti" resembles the Dragon Slayers of every mythology, from Bel-Marduk of the Assyrians to Thor of the Scandinavians and Finn M'Cull of the Celts; but he is sadly fallen from his high estate and become a figure of fun, with his huge head and his shirt too long for him. A primitive respect for deformity or else some modification of the monstrous shapes of a pagan Pantheon may account for the baby's misshapen figure. The long shirt has clearly been added to provide a comic figure of the sort dear to the Maltese sense of the ridiculous.

The stories of the Kaukam and of Pietru Lagrimanti are but two of many tales in which pursuit of the Old Things, through the labyrinth which time has built around them, is a fascinating pastime. Enough has been said to illustrate the way in which a tenacious handful of peasants has handed down, through the centuries, legends of great antiquity—in some cases nearly intact.

GROWN UP

The Maltese—a people as old as time—are a people who never grow up. In this lies their chief charm. For Zeppu the passing of childhood means only an understanding of the ancient price of manhood:

> "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken. . . ."

For Grez the flowering into womanhood brings only the divine command:

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> "In sorrow shalt thou bring forth children and thou shalt be under thy husband's power, and he shall have dominion over thee. . . ."

In all other things they remain children and "of such is the Kingdom. . . ."

So that the curse of Adam may lie less heavily upon these children of an unfertile rock, the Old Things have blessed them with an uncanny ability to make flowering fields out of nothing.[1]

THE SKY AND THE SOIL

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[369]

The weather and husbandry lore of the peasant has much to do with the success of his untiring hands. Much of this peasant wisdom is incomprehensible to the town-bred Maltese (too often they have lost touch or dismiss it—in hybrid Italian—as *ignuranza*); much of it has exact parallels in the lore of the English countryside, as for example the following:

Maltese	*English*
821 171 539 "The Moon eats everything."	"Fair weather with a full moon."
"The stars wink at the coming wind."	"Twinkling stars foretell high winds."
"Sky like a turtle's back; heavy rains, fierce winds."	"A rounded cloud with flattened base carries rainfall in its face."
"Clouds with heads of men and beasts bring in the thunder and the lightning."	

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[1] During the early years of the last century Malta's cotton crop was valued at an average of one and a half millions sterling annually. The cotton industry, dating from Roman times and earlier, is now practically dead.

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Maltese	*English*
"Red sky at evening, harness your mules. Red sky at morning, herd your beasts."	"Red sky at night, Shepherd's delight. Red sky in the morning Shepherd's warning."
"Ill weather comes, ahead or astern, when the cat sneezes."	"The cat washes herself before stormy weather."

821 171 539 [825]

Often it appears that sheer nonsense is mixed with sound common sense. Typical of the mixed "sense" and "nonsense" is the following:

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"The first autumnal produce of the wild fig is called by the Maltese *Barru*. A second crop which takes place in winter is supposed to be due to the outcome of the first produce. This is called *Carru*, and is supposed to bring forth the third outcrop which appears in spring time and is recognized as the *dukkar* or real fertilizer of the fig. This fruit is cut and hung up in pairs on the bough of the fig tree.

"The male fruit (*dukkar*) is usually full of a colony of minute winged insects by the produce of which, the Maltese husbandman identifies the real fertilizing fruit. [825]

"The pomegranate is supposed to be fertilized by the flowers of the wild parsnip, and for this purpose bunches of these flowers are thrown over the pomegranate tree when in flower. *Dakra*, probably from *dakar* = to fertilize, is the name given to the wild parsnip by the Maltese husbandman.

"The male flowers of the wild carob-tree (*baghal*) are thrown over the branches of the female plant to favour impregnation.

Small pieces of coarse stone are still hung up in the jujube-tree with a view to securing a good produce. 241 823

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241 823 [171] Husbandmen would still consider that queer operation as a medium of impregnation (*Dukkar*). This strange usage may, however, be traced amongst the *fellahin* of Upper Egypt, where, as Professor Sayce points out in his contribution to the *Cairene and Upper Egypt Folklore* (Folklore, Vol. XXXI, No. 2, 1920, p. 200) phallic symbols are still hung up to protect the melons and sugar-cane. The old Maltese practice of hanging up stones to the jujube-tree may therefore be considered as a modification of this early phallic worship."[1]

The sense contained in these practices requires no elucidation. The horticulturist with his camel hair brush does no better than the peasant with the male carob flowers. The votive stones are a silent appeal to the oldest and greatest of the Old Things, to the All-Father, Giver of Life and Fertility, whose ancient and enduring image, from Drizzlecombe in Devon to the High Places of Melanesia, is the Rock or Stone without shape—the altar of "The Unknown God"—"Thou art Peter and upon this Rock. . . ."

[538] Traces of this rock-cult are plentiful enough in Maltese folklore. Children who throw stones into a well or into the sea will one day have to gather them up by their eyelashes. The "old stones" (i.e. *menhir*) resent being moved and are, for that reason, twice as heavy as ordinary stones.

751 825 776 "St. Paul's tongue"—a valuable amulet against the evil-eye and against all venoms—takes the form of fossilized teeth found in the ancient rocks. The blessed tongue which preached the gospel of the Redeemer is enshrined for ever in rock, the symbol of the Father.

776 823 St. Paul's rock-cell, in which he is reputed to have lived, has the miraculous property that no matter how much of the rock is cut away its bulk grows no less—a clear expression

[1] Lecture by Mr. Cremona at the University of Malta in 1922.

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584 will walk up and down the village street wearing a red carna-
824 tion behind his right ear and a red handkerchief thrown over his left shoulder. The shy maiden will be peeping from behind the latticed window, probably accompanied by one or two giggling, curious younger sisters.

The symbolic bush has about it something of the atmosphere of the Song of Solomon:

> My beloved is unto me as a
> cluster of camphire in the vineyards of En-Gedi . . .
>
> I am the Rose of Sharon and
> the lily of the valleys. . . .
>
> A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse . . .
>
> Awake, O North Wind; and come, thou south;
> blow upon my garden that the spices
> thereof may flow out.
> Let my beloved come into his garden,
> and eat his pleasant fruits.

[822] The red carnation and the red handkerchief, badges of the
• [171] lover, are of that colour which is sacred to Venus. The wearing of the flower has its parallel amongst the Polynesians, to whom a red flower behind the right ear means "I am looking for a sweetheart."

584 Official "courting" will not begin until the "go-between" and the parents have arranged matters to everybody's satisfaction.

585 After the religious ceremony the young folk separate,
801 returning to their homes for a period of eight days before
171 setting up house. The reason for the choice of the number "eight" may not be without significance; for eight, it is said, was one of the signs of the goddess Astoreth, while the ancient Egyptians had a company of eight gods who were the Fathers and Mothers of the World. The double form of the figure "8"

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was anciently used to represent the tying of Life with Spirit. Its association with the "True Lovers' Knot" of our grandmothers is obvious. There is Biblical authority, too, for the separation of husband from wife, in the incident between Tobias and the Angel Raphael.

Tobias (or Tobit) is about to be wedded to the maiden whose former seven husbands have been slain on the bridal night by an evil spirit. The angel says, "For they who in such manner receive matrimony as to shut out God from themselves to their lust, as the horse and mule, which they have not understanding. Over them the devil hath power. . . . Keep thyself continent from her. . . ."[1]

So far the marriage customs which remain extant—only one or two generations separate Zeppu and Gretz from the more primitive customs. Here is what a Maltese writer has to say of marriages in the not very distant past:

> "The articles of the contract having been settled, and the marriage portion agreed upon, the young man sent his intended bride a present consisting of a certain fish ornamented with garlands of ribband, with a ring or some costly jewel in its mouth.
>
> The first interview was then fixed to take place in presence of the parents and their kinsfolk, best friends, and neighbours, who were regaled with sweetmeats and other refreshments.
>
> Before this meeting took place, the mothers of the two young people retired either into an arbour in the garden or some separate apartment, where they prepared a mixture of aniseed, aromatic plants, salt, and honey with which they rubbed the bride's lips, with the idea of rendering her affable and prudent. She was then conducted into the room where her future husband awaited

[1] *Tobias*, VI, 17–18.

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continually fed by the scores of by-standers who take great delight in throwing amidst the flames some old rickety piece of furniture which they consider as lumber in their houses. Lots of happy and reckless children, and very often men, are seen merrily leaping in succession over and through the crackling flames."[1]

At the time of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, the Grand Master himself, soon after the *Angelus*, used to leave his palace, accompanied by the Grand Prior, the Bishop and two bailiffs, to set fire to some pitch barrels which were placed for the occasion in the square facing the sacred hospital.

Great crowds used to assemble here in order to assist at this ceremony. The setting ablaze of the five casks, and later on, of the eight casks,[2] by the Grand Master, was a signal for the others to kindle their fires in the different parts of the town.

Various opinions are entertained by antiquarian writers with regard to the origin of these fires on St. John's Eve.

From the account given by Jacob Grimm in his *Deutsche Mythologie*, pp. 583, 593, it would appear that the great blaze reserved for the eve of the feast of the nativity of St. John the Baptist on June 23rd is observed with similar rites in every country of Europe.

The kindling of the fire, the leaping over or through the flames clearly show that these rites are essentially of

[1] Leaping over the fires is mentioned among the superstitious rites at the Palilia feasts, instituted in honour of *Pales*, the goddess of shepherds (in the calends of May) in Ovid's Fasti.

"Moxque per ardentes stipulae crepitantis acervos
traijcias celeri strenua membra pede."

The learned Moresin appears to have been of opinion that the custom of leaping over these fires is a vestige of the ordeal, where to be able to pass through fires with safety, was held to be an indication of innocence.

[2] Eight being the languages of the Order.

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796 372 171 heathen origin. They are obviously connected with the worship of the sun, and were doubtless practised long before the Baptist was born. In old heathen times the summer and winter solstices were the two greatest and most widespread festivals in Europe.

These fires (says another writer) are evidently a remnant of the ancient Bel fires of the Druids, at the *Beil* time, which was at the beginning of May. But why do they chiefly occur on the night before the festival of the Saint, instead of the old period of *Beil* time which was the beginning of May? I do not believe that a satisfactory explanation of these circumstances has yet been given by any of the antiquaries. It was perhaps to transfer the practice or custom of lighting these fires from a pagan to a Christian object.

796 372 776 The Nativity of St. John Baptist was a great and solemn festival of the Church, like those of the other great festivals of Martyrs, the eve or vigil of it was, in the early ages, commemorated with appropriate ceremonies. The public devotions were kept up all night in the churches, of which the Saint was the Patron, and the solemnities of the next day were ushered in amongst types and figures appropriate to the occasion. Amongst these was probably introduced a large and unusual exhibition of lights to typify the Baptist who, in the Gospel, is called by the Saviour himself 'A burning, shining light.' What could have been more natural than that the early Christian authorities would have directed the people to light their anniversary fires on the eve of this Saint, and thus give to the national custom a Christian instead of a pagan significance? To this feeling, most likely, is due the transfer of the fires to June 23rd, and perhaps, too, this perpetuation to this day amongst the people.

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Dr. Milner is of opinion that the fires lighted up all over the continent, on the eve of June 24th, are not intended as the idolatrous worship of the sun or *Baal*, the Philistine God of Fire, but in honour of Christ's precursor, as alluding to his character of bearing witness to the light (John i. 7) and of his being himself a bright and shining light (John v. 35)."

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It is of some interest to compare the Maltese account with the following notes on English Midsummer customs which appeared in the *Radio Times* recently under the signature of Felix Felton, compere of so many excellent folklore broadcasts:

> "Midsummer's Eve is also St. John's Eve. . . . Sermons on that day used to be preached out of doors in the quadrangle of Magdalen College, Oxford, 'that the preaching might more nearly resemble that of John the Baptist in the wilderness'; and bonfires were lighted in various parts of the country, 'betokennynge that Saint Johan was a lanterne of light to the people.' Then comes a collection of curious legends and superstitions connected with certain herbs. The legends attribute to these all kinds of magical powers; women, it is said, can tell by hempseed[1] who their husband is to be; and in Shropshire it was believed that those who failed to hang up St. John's Wort outside their doors would suffer by their cows going dry and their hens refusing to lay. Finally come the Midsummer's Eve revels and festivals—the old London processions, the revels at Penzance, the gatherings at Stonehenge, and the bonfire festivities still held to-day. . . .
>
> As varied as the customs themselves are the possible

[1] Compare the reference to hempseed in "The Sweetheart's Bargain."

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explanations of them. Two kinds of explanations have to be treated with some caution, the local one and the Christian one . . . and we shall find ourselves going back for the true causes to the worship of the sun and of the seasons. 796 171

The revel, easily degenerating into the brawl, has always found opposition, as in the thunderous verse of an old poet who branded the Midsummer processions as

> Of Edinburgh the great idolatrie
> And manifest abomination.

Other forces have militated against them besides the disapproval of the austere. As another old writer has rather obscurely remarked: 'No suffimen is a greater fugator of phantosmes than gunpowder.' Other such fugators are periods of increased popular education and of quickened pace in national life. These forces have been active enough in our own times, and few Midsummer customs have survived them; but all of them were originally the spontaneous outcome of certain impulses in the make-up of human beings, and thus, past or present, they are of permanent interest to us."

There seems little doubt that the Night of Fires belongs to that very early civilization of which, as has been suggested elsewhere, the Maltese are amongst the direct descendants. What more appropriate than the adaptation of these ancient fires to the honour of that Saint beneath whose banner there happened all that is most valiant in Maltese history? 372 796 174

In one form or another practically all the "seasonal" customs familiar in other countries appear in Malta: All Fools' Day, with its affinity to the Hindu festival of Huli; May Day, when the children gather green bows in honour of Flora; New Year's Day, when lime is strewn on doorsteps in token of good luck; but Malta's most popular holiday is the period of Carnival. Its 796 [527] [171]

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taught to wave, while the band plays the national anthem, 796
'God Save the King.' In the time of the Order they proceeded to the palace to receive permission for the celebration of the Carnival. Their request was signified to the Grand Master by one of the knights, and upon the boon being granted, they immediately performed a dance in front of the palace, and afterwards before the door of any other person, whom they thought would pay them for their trouble.

The origin of this amusement must be sought for in 796
the annals of pagan rites, which Christianity has not 1710
succeeded in abolishing in several countries of Europe. In a work on Malta, *Par un voyageur François*, the author ranks it with a popular feast very ancient in Thessaly, the *Salzea* of the Babylonians, the *Chronia* of the Athenians, and the *Saturnalia* of Rome, which many of the early Christians continued, notwithstanding the zealous efforts which were made by the Church to abolish them."

It will be noted that the public "masque" was regarded 796
as "an absurd and foolish diversion." The "diversion" must 656
at some time have proved rather more dangerous than absurd, for the wearing of masks after sunset is now forbidden by law. It is of interest also to note that an attempt on the part [669]
of a strict Sabbatarian Governor who hailed from north of the Tweed to abolish the merrymaking on the Sunday of Carnival led to a major civil disturbance which could only be quelled at bayonet point, and which is still remembered by those who are, for one cause or another, "agin' the Government!"

DYING

Zeppu's tired hands are at rest. They lie, brown and calloused, 763
upon the coverlet. The village bell tolls urgently. The *fratelli*

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The fratelli
763 —lay brethren of the congregation—hurry from their homes
794 to take their places in the procession of the Viatecum. Marching rapidly, like a company of soldiers, headed by a peasant ringing a staccato, commanding bell, some bearing tapers, some censers, all chanting the prayers for the dying, they pass
[793] quickly through the village street. Under a canopy, borne by two sturdy *fratelli*, goes the priest in his bright vestments, bearing God to the dying man.

The women hurry to place a light in their windows, kneel and pray as God passes.

So, with such poor pomp as these simple folk can muster,
764 the Prince of Peace comes to dying Zeppu. The funeral rites
[171] and customs differ hardly at all nowadays from those of other Catholic countries. But Zeppu's grandfather could remember a time when the Old Things were much in evidence.

764 There were the "Wailing Women" (whose name *neuuieha*
767 survives in the sense of "one who constantly complains"). They wore long black robes, and chanted death-songs whose burden was a combination of praise for the deceased's virtues and rebuke for his having left them. They cut the vines from the courtyard, overturned the furniture, broke pottery, and mixed the fragments with soot and ashes, staining the doors
[302] of the bereaved house with the mixture. They cut pieces of their hair and scattered them over the coffin.

765 If the dead man possessed horses, cows, goats, all their tails
[262] had pieces cut from them in token of mourning. There was a
[764] form of "wake" where funeral cakes and boiled wheat were eaten. A carpet was spread over the tomb to prevent the unware from treading on it.

[372] No fire was lit in the house for three days after the funeral.
[302] The women kept to the house for forty days. The men, having remained indoors for seven days, went unshaven.

764 Here are clear signs of the most primitive funeral rites
174 and *taboos*. Death was a pollution—hence the segregation of

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
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527 would insist on the stipulation being inserted in their
173 marriage settlement, their *kitba taz-zwieġ*, that their husbands
584 should take them to the Mnarja every year.

The banners given in prizes to the present day are long
526 and narrow pieces of brocade of different colours called
361 *paliu*, which it is the custom of the fortunate winners to take back to their casals to be used as the altar-cloth of the parish church for the ensuing year. The casals, it should be explained, are the 'villages' of Malta, if 'village' is the appropriate term, for they are stone-built compact townships with populations often running into five figures. The Maltese word for them is *hal*.

291 Again, our visitor will learn that the *faldetta* or *ghonnella*—the true Maltese term is *stamina*—of the Maltese women does not owe its existence, as some people allege, to the need for defence against the excessive gallantry of Bonaparte's troops, but is of much more ancient origin. If proof were needed, there is in the Royal Malta Library a print of the year 1576 showing a Maltese lady wearing the national head-dress. The *ghonnella* is a voluminous hood of rich silk—black everywhere save in the villages of Zabbar and Zejtun, where it is blue and is called *xurqana*—stiffened inside the top edge by a piece of cardboard about a yard long, one end of which rests on the head, while the other end has to be held. Originally, it was really, like the Turkish *charshaf*, a skirt or petticoat (which is what the word *ghonnella* means) thrown up over the head. Later it was curtailed, for which reason it is sometimes called *nofs ghonnella*, a half skirt; but it is still cut to show the placket-hole—in point of fact, half the placket-hole—of the garment from which it has sprung.

●[191] This striking and picturesque mode of female adornment or, rather, concealment constitutes Malta's one characteristic article of dress and is the local method of shrouding a woman's face and form, a custom common to southern latitudes from as far east as India to as far west as the Azores,

9: Luke G-5 (ca. 1920-ca. 1960) 1960
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although the Maltese form was probably dictated by the need to cover the head when entering a church. Its one drawback is that it takes up a lot of space, more space, unfortunately, than is available in the motor-bus, modern Malta's form of land transport. Let it be hoped that it will survive these disabilities, for it is not only unique but also an asset if those of the younger generation who have abandoned it in favour of the banal dress of everywhere else would only realize the fact, enhancing beauty while discreetly veiling any imperfections. These young ladies should ponder the words of Monsieur André Maurois in his little sketch of Malta:

> When its wearer moves, the *faldetta* is filled with air, and the Maltese girls, tripping in twos and threes along the streets, look like flotillas of graceful barques with black sails, blown along their course by the wind of destiny.

Oddly enough another French visitor and Academician anticipated by just a century, and in almost the same terms, Monsieur Maurois's charming flight, or perhaps echo, of fancy. Monsieur de Lamartine, visiting Malta with his English wife in 1832, describes the *ghonnella* as

> a half-cloak of black silk . . . of a light texture caught by a breeze, suggesting the sail of a skiff whose capricious folds alternately conceal and reveal the mysterious figure of the wearer, which seems able to escape at will from its embrace.

In the Malta of an earlier age, when the lives of Maltese women and girls were closely circumscribed, the *ghonnella* was not the only aid to their seclusion. Those who wander about the country districts will notice here and there that the older farmhouses have no windows giving on to the street; the Maltese countrywoman, like her Spanish sister, had to turn her face inward, not outward. But what the houses had, and some still retain, were stone brackets on the outer wall, made to hold the pots of sweet basil which showed that